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WARD H. LAMON

AND

THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE.

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MY DEAR GENERAL:

Permit me to thank you and other friends at Bloomington for many late attentions, among which I feel compelled to mention your last letter and its enclosure—a copy of the *Weekly Pantagraph*, of April 25, 1866. In it I find an article taken from the *Jacksonville Journal*, a portion of which the *Journal*, in turn, credits to the *Chicago Tribune*; all of which is supposed to have been suggested by a letter written by me to President Johnson and published pretty extensively by the loyal press of the country.

For this gross compound of vulgar defamation the *Pantagraph* acknowledges itself indebted to the joint mendacity of the *Tribune* and the *Journal*, and then, that these “apples of gold” might not be without their “pictures of silver,” it dishes up the whole with a few mild and very apparent slanders of its own. As skilled counterfeiters always find baser, meaner, and more ignorant criminals to “shove” the false coin, so this man seems to think himself generally employed to retail all the impudent calumnies which his industrious scissors can glean from his exchanges. He seems to have a natural bent for this menial part of the business of newspaper defamation; but he ought never to aspire above it, and will inevitably spoil any well got-up slander which he attempts to amend while passing through his willing but clumsy hands. He will never succeed at the business of original lying, for the simple reason that he has not sufficient mind to lie *well* or *plausibly*. The practice of this vice is not so simple a thing after all. To excel as the great exemplars of the vice have excelled, to become notorious and earn a livelihood as a mere common defamer, to have his name enrolled among the stars of the profession, beside those of Barrere, White, or Conover, a man must not only be a knave, but he must be a keen, shrewd, quick-witted, and long-headed knave. This fellow of the *Pantagraph* is doubtless a knave, and ambitious of doing all the malicious mischief he can; but his effort in my

case convinces me that if he is a very despicable creature, he is also a very harmless one. If all his falsehoods are as transparent and ill-contrived as the one he aimed at me, he might scribble on forever to the injury of nobody. "We need simply to state," he says, "that here, where Mr. L. was well known for six years, *he was never trusted as a Republican*, and we all wondered at Mr. Lincoln's confidence in such a man." His memory, as you will see, is very short; indeed, the proverb attributes "short memories" to all his class. Everybody in that section of the State is well aware that I was twice elected district attorney on the Republican ticket by the numerous counties of the eighth judicial district, the first time including the capital of the State. In 1856 I received more votes than any other candidate on the ticket, and in 1860 I was *unanimously* chosen by the people to the same office. This bit of history will show that Mr. Lincoln's "confidence" in me was shared by all his immediate fellow-citizens and by all mine, and that, too, at the very time this innocent man describes himself as being in a state of absolute "*wonder*" at Mr. Lincoln's regard for me. It is hardly probable that the feeble breath of such a simapleton and such a scamp will outweigh the recorded verdict of a whole people.

I am not exactly sure that I ever saw the editor of the *Jacksonville Journal*. His contribution to this exquisite patchwork of slander seems to have been entirely gratuitous—an amateur piece of scurrility, merely to employ the fingers which had a natural itching for the work. I was never a candidate for Congress, as he asserts, and of course never asked his support. If he is the man I suspect him to be, I have had but one interview with him for years; he then appeared as a pitiful mendicant, whose ambition was limited to the plunder of my purse. He succeeded in relieving me of a few hundred dollars in the shape of a loan, and it is not worth while to remark, that the conscious rascal has ever since preferred other society to mine. I have only heard of him since as a sort of political vagabond or hack, "at your service," for a small gratuity—an excellent hand to suggest a stratagem for reaching the bottom of a decent man's pocket.



or for calumniating a pure and honorable reputation. Having no character to sell or to lose, he can be had *cheap*, and is not particular about the kind of work he is required to do. He will spew out his foul aspersions upon the purest and noblest name in the land with as little scruple as he would borrow money or puff the grog-shop that gave him free drinks.

I am also informed that a clerical imposter, by the name of Hammond, has amused himself by circulating and enlarging upon these slanders in his paper at Danville. Courts of justice do not take the evidence of persons convicted of infamous crimes, nor do the public, credit the utterances of a debauched preacher or a canting libertine. This fellow, a clergyman after the Onderdonk and Kalloch pattern, a pastor rising fresh from the embraces of a prostituted parishioner, may pollute my name by uttering it, but can surely leave no stain on my character.

When the *Tribune* article first appeared, I took some pains to learn which particular one of Mr. Lincoln's old traducers had turned his attention to me. A call upon one of the editors here, (who denied all knowledge of it,) and a little further inquiry, led me to the conclusion that Horace White might reasonably claim the honor of that elegant and truthful composition. He evidently intended this trashy string of falsehoods to be as brutal in effect as it was in temper, and if he lacked the facts necessary to a formidable assault, he would make up that little defect by malicious and impudent assertions. In White's view of the case, I was simply offensively honest and consistent, and it is, of course, perfectly natural that he should belie and traduce me. By a corrupt abuse of his confidential relations to a congressional committee, the fellow amassed a handsome sum in whiskey speculations, and in his purchase of an interest in the *Tribune* with this hire of official debasement there was a sort of eminent propriety. "Baseness was an instinct in him;" it was an impulse of his nature to seek this thriving band of shameless calumniators—calumniators who knew no tie of political or personal fidelity; to whom plunder was everything, honor and shame were nothing; who pretended to have political sentiments, not

because they were blessed with a conscience, but because they had a newspaper, and by a union of venality, calumny, and treachery, it could be made to pay. Where else could this creature have found congenial society and congenial work? The hand of this unclean scamp is against whatever is pure and decent in society, as naturally and inevitably as Falstaff fell to lechery and his cups, and therefore his proper place was the *Tribune* office.

It is a sufficient answer to all the statements of his article that they formed the staple of much discussion in the newspapers, in Congress, and elsewhere, and that several delegations of my personal enemies retailed these identical slanders to the ear of President Lincoln himself. Mr. Wilson, Mr. Hale, Mr. Grimes, or Mr. Washburne might tell Mr. White with what contempt and disgust they were received. With disdain and indignation he repulsed all the efforts of that powerful and malignant conspiracy to defraud me of my good name as an officer and a man. Some of my maligners are not likely to forget the brief and pithy sentences in which the President expressed these sentiments.

Mr. Lincoln found it impossible to betray his friend for the single reason that he had been loaded with the falsehoods of a vile faction, which had only for the moment ceased its treacherous warfare upon him to begin it upon me. And when, in the fear that my continuance in place might embarrass him, I tendered my resignation, he again and again refused to accept it, with the assurance that when I laid down my office it should not be with his consent. Solely in deference to his views I held it, though unprofitable and unpleasant to me, until after his death, when I improved the first opportunity to retire.

It is perfectly true, as my assailants allege, that I did issue an order to keep mischievous meddlers and malicious gossips—even though they might be members of Congress—from nosing and prying about the jail. I did not think it fit that some of the persons who claimed this right should be continually confederating and sweltering with negroes in my cells. On one occasion I withheld a negro strumpet, committed to my cus-

today, from the arms of her paramour for several days, which proved a frightful scandal to the Military Governor and a portion of the United States Senate, but which Mr. Lincoln deemed a very proper thing to do. This is what this Horace White calls "the hand of oppression laid heavily on the colored people of the District." If he will divest himself of his prejudices in favor of amalgamated society, he will see in this only a benevolent attempt to protect the morals of the negroes. To be sure these unfortunate people have since become "the wards of the nation," but they were then mine, and as the object of all legal punishment is in part the reformation of the criminal, I cannot understand upon what principle of official duty I could have permitted the negroes under my care to associate with such visitors as I have referred to.

White's individual antecedents are probably of no sort of importance to anybody; but as a perfect type of a very infamous class, he may deserve a word or two more. It so happened that the despicable faction which he, as a hireling, served, gave Mr. Lincoln's administration about the only serious trouble it ever had. He himself was the "On to Richmond" correspondent of the *Tribune*, and the mischief he did was precisely commensurate with his mean ability. Mr. Lincoln gave one of the *Tribune* editors the lucrative office of postmaster at Chicago, and another the largest cotton permit ever issued, (by the way, this was given to the only *gentleman* I ever knew connected with this filthy sheet,) and the *Tribune* office controlled a large amount of the executive patronage in Illinois; but this generous effort to appease their cormorant appetites only stimulated them to publish more venomous and mendacious assaults upon him and his policy. Depraved and insolent speculators in the blood and credit of the country, they took up the war-cries of Wendell Phillips, and denounced Abraham Lincoln as an "obstacle" to the devilish progress of the radical scheme, not for restoring, but for dissevering the Union. They united themselves with those atrocious conspirators, who sought to depose him from office and proclaim a dictator in the person of Fremont or Ben. Wade. Because he was wise and merciful,

they painted him as weak and imbecile. Because he "waged the war in no spirit of conquest or subjugation, but solely for the supremacy of the Union and the Constitution," they joined the infidels and red republicans and pronounced him a Pharaoh, who would not "let the people go." On their own theory they proceeded to make themselves his "lice and flies"—his intolerable curse and nuisance—to the very hour of his death. Then they sang brutal and impious hymns of praise to the Almighty for removing him who "had been so clear in his great office," and putting in his room one who despised the weak and temporizing thought of restoring the peace and integrity of the country, but would constitute himself a fatal scourge to the whole people of the South. They licked their lips over his blood and thanked God that now they might embroil their country still deeper, and like cowardly wolves and hyenas, they might strip and tear and mangle a defenceless and prostrate people. His death was a joyous event to them, and for aught I know their incendiary calumnies may have inspired his assassin. At all events, if Booth had wrapped his bullet in a shred of the *Chicago Tribune*, he might have lodged a vindication of his crime in the brain of his victim. They had already assassinated, so far as in them lay, the good name of that pure and noble victim—and he their constant and habitual benefactor! They "stabbed him in a friendly embrace," for they took his patronage without stint, and then stung his heart with cruel and persistent defamation.

They embittered his mightiest toils and balked his dearest purposes when the destinies of the nation were trembling in the balance, and his holiest ambition was to save it. Such are the men who, for the mere gratification of slandering somebody, have chosen to depict me as a "hyena feasting upon the dead body of Lincoln." I leave you to draw the parallel between us. No one knew Mr. Lincoln better, none loved him more than I. My friendship did not begin with his official career. I was near him in private life; I was near him in all the darkest hours of the late struggle; I was near him when the first rational hope of peace dawned upon the land. In

truth, I might say without offense to the people of his State and mine, that I retained his confidence unshaken as he retained my affections unbroken, until his own life was offered up the last great sacrifice to domestic discord, on the very threshold of peace, and in the actual blaze and glory of the nation's triumph.

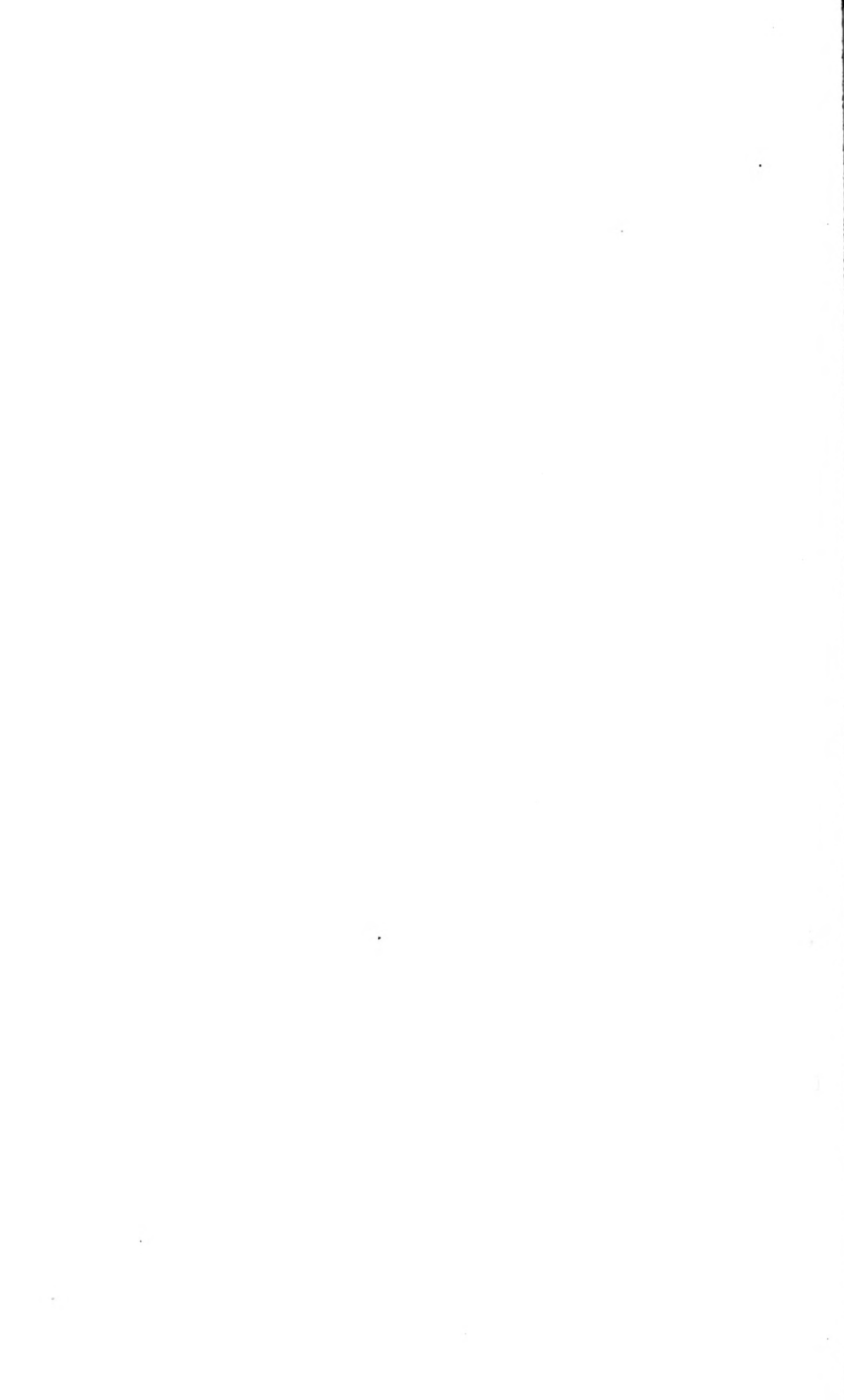
I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

WARD H. LAMON,

*Washington, D. C.*

General ASAHEL GRIDLEY,

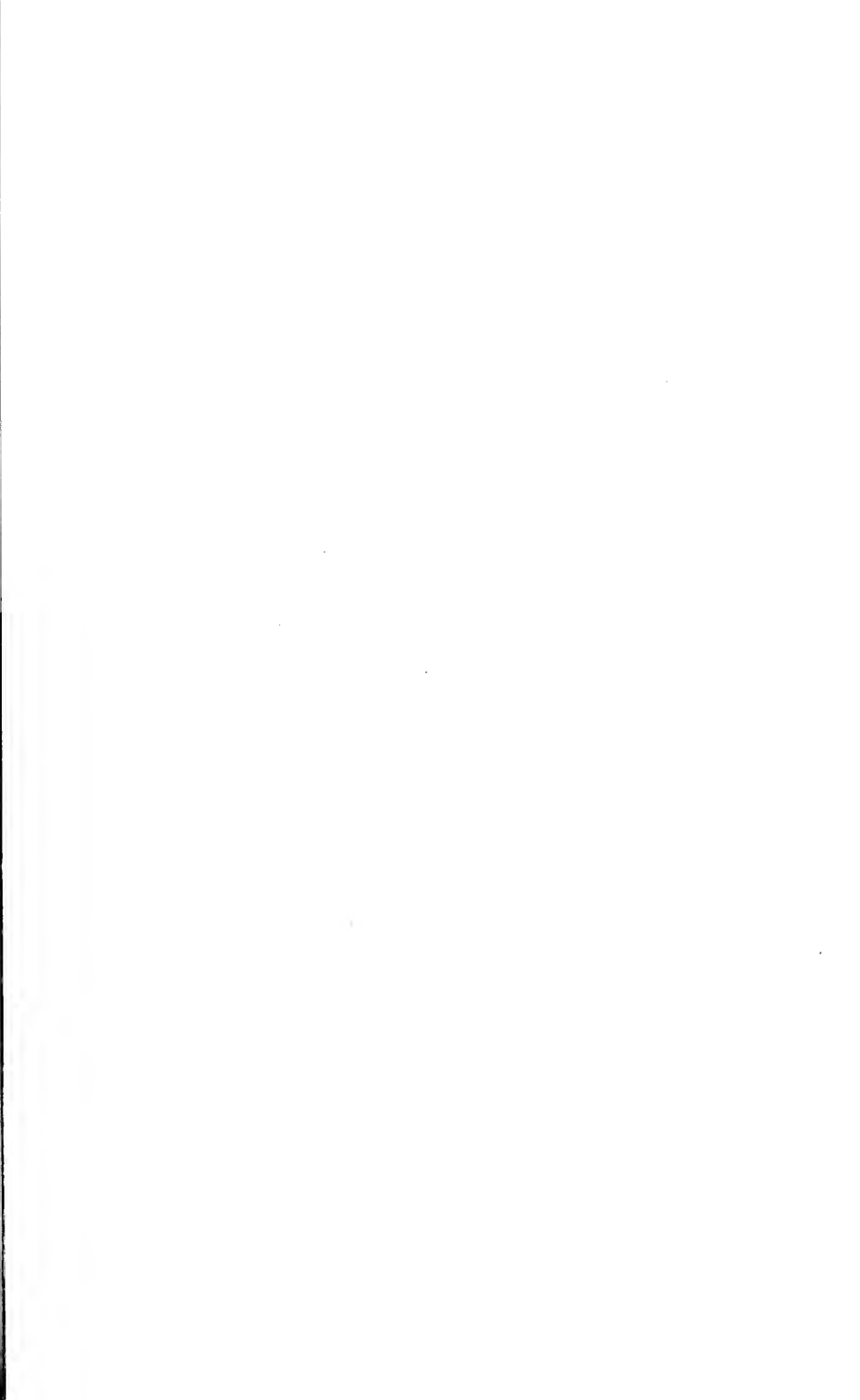
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